

“Standing Firm”

2 Thessalonians More About the End Times

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

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Jeff: Father in heaven, thank You for the day and for the time You’ve given, for the blessing of being together. And Lord, thank You for this group of men. We ask that You’ll continue to bless us. And Lord, we ask that You’ll be with Don. We certainly pray for his well-being and ask that You would help him to recover from whatever he’s ailing from. And Lord, we’re thankful for him and for his presence and for what he provides our group.

Lord, thank You that You have blessed us in so many ways, and Lord that You bless us with help meets. And we think about Kevin and his wife and his trials right now. And so Lord, we pray for them both, as she has to navigate knee replacements and still care for Kevin. And so Lord, we just ask that You’ll work that out to Your glory and their good.

And Lord, as we gather before You today we pray that You’ll bless us as we study Your word. Give us insight into it and help us, Lord, not only to have a better way of thinking about Your word, but also a way of applying it to our lives. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Ted Wood: Jeff, I was thinking about that this morning, just how grateful we are for you.

Jeff: Oh, thanks.

Ted: And when you do this you have to prepare for this. Then you go from here to the seminary.

Jeff: Uh-huh.

Ted: And then you have to teach there. You’ve got a church—teaching, sermons. I imagine this is a little embarrassing; I apologize. And you’ve got pastoral issues. So what you do is extraordinary, and I love it.

Jeff: Plus I have my own issues; I am an issue person. *(Laughter)*

Ted: And I thought that you are so far in the Lord that you do far more than I knew you did. *(Applause)*

Jeff: Oh, that’s kind of you; I appreciate that. Don’t you say anything to Tab. You’ve got to stay away from the wife somehow. *(Laughter)* Don’t you tell her, Roger.

Gary Craig: If it makes it easier you could just teach us your seminary class, you know?

Jeff: That’s right, that’s right.

Gary: And your Student papers.

Jeff: That’s right, that’s right. So today we’re going to think about standing firm. I want us to think about 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. And I want us to move on to verse 13 and following. However, you actually have to put the gadget into the computer for it to sense it. I don’t know if you knew that or not; apparently I didn’t. So here we go. So we’re in verses 13-17 today.

Transcriber’s Note: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17, ESV. *“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the*

“Standing Firm”

firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this He called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

“So then, brothers, stand firm, and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”

And this is the outline for today. We’re going to look at the process of standing firm, the posture of standing firm and the product of standing firm in these verses. And I’m going to say a couple of words by way of introduction.

One of the things that I think is helpful is to remind us that the habit of good thinking leads to right living. And I really like Peanuts. And so I don’t know if you can read this or not; it’s pretty small. But this is Lucy and Linus and they’re at the window. And Lucy says, “Boy, it looks as if the rain is going to flood the world.”

And Linus says, “It will never do that. In the ninth chapter of Genesis God promised Noah that He would never again flood the world, and He gave us a rainbow as a promise.”

And then Lucy says, “You’ve taken a great load off my mind.”

And Linus says, “Sound theology has a way of doing that.” (*Laughter*) And I just love that because words help. And you know, sometimes we don’t have a tendency to think that way. I know that sometimes people have a tendency to think that words are just words; what really matters is what we do.

I had an interesting thing happen to me the other day. I just happened to be able to compare Bat Man to Jane Austin. And they both have the same philosophy, right? They have the same philosophy. It doesn’t matter what you think; it doesn’t matter what you say. What matters is what you do.

And Scripture has a different way of thinking about that. It has a different way of approaching the whole issue of conduct and life. And it really starts with your thinking. And what you say reveals what’s in your heart and what’s in your mind. And then that leads into what you do. And so sound theology has a way of moving us forward; it has a way of setting us in the right path and moving us in the right direction, especially when we face things like what the Thessalonians were facing, which was, if we can use the rain metaphor, a downpour. They were experiencing persecution.

I mentioned this to you earlier. And I said to you that if you go back to Acts chapter 17, one of the things that you find is that there were riots happening in the city. You can read about that there. And when you think about the riots that are reported in Acts, when you think about what Paul says in his letters to the Thessalonians, you don’t really get a clear sense of what happened. You get a sense that there were riots. And then you get a sense that there was, for instance, some serious concern about those who had died. But there’s no connection as to the two.

And one might conclude—and I sometimes do think it’s the case—that probably some died as a result of the riots. And there were those who had heard the gospel, and they were wondering about those who had passed on. What about them?—that kind of thing.

“Standing Firm”

And then there were those who were in these earlier days suggesting that the day of the Lord had already come, and so they had missed out on it anyway. So if you have dead people who were close to you, and maybe had even professed faith, and the day of the Lord has come anyway. So sorry; I guess they’re out of luck; that kind of thing.

So there is really a sense in which the riots and the unsettled nature of the letters produce in one sense the opportunity for unsettled thinking. And that has a way of producing an unsettled life. So what Paul is doing, he’s saying, hey, look. Let me give you a perspective. Let me give you a framework in order to think about all the things that are happening to you in life, so that you can not only have a settled way of thinking, but a settled life as you live, as you make right decisions, and so on.

Well that takes us to what we left off with the last time. Now I said to you the last time the apostasy came, and the restrainer who holds him back, we dealt with him just a little bit last time. And I’m going to say a little bit more about what I said last time. And I want you to see the perspective I’m coming from before we move further out of the introduction.

I know you may not be able to see this. But I want you to go with me to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 if you’re not there, because what I’m going to say in some ways is predicated on at least in my understanding of why I’m taking the position. So for instance you find that in verse 6 he says, “*And you know what is restraining.*”

Now Ted can check me on this. But this is the word for “restrainer” here. It’s not a pronoun, but it is a definite article. This is a participle. And basically what this is telling you is that this is a neuter participle. The (*unclear*) will tell you the same thing. But the idea is that there is no pronoun. But this is a neuter for “restrainer.” That’s why they translate it not with *who*. Look at the verse. “*And you know what is restraining.*” That’s why they have “what.” That’s why they don’t have “*And you know He who is restraining,*” because it’s not He. It’s not masculine, nor is it feminine; it’s a neuter. What is restraining; there’s your neuter.

And then go on to verse 7. In verse 7 it says, “*For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains.*”

Now if you look at that, the interesting thing is this. It’s the same thing; it’s a participle. This is telling you it’s masculine. So that’s why they translate it in the ESV anyway as “*only he who now restrains.*” “He who now restrains” is the translation for this chart right here: “*He who now restrains.*” So the idea is that here it’s masculine.

So now you have the restrainer described in neuter terms and in masculine terms. And so what is it? Is it a neuter? Is it a thing? Is it a person? Is it he? And so I happen to think that this versatility allows for us to think about this as being something of both a thing and a person.

In other words I said to you the last time that I thought that the restrainer was the law. And when you think about the restrainer being the law you can think about the restrainer being a person who administers the law, whether that be an emperor or a judge or whoever. And so the idea is that the man of lawlessness is restrained by law. And when law is removed then lawlessness reigns. And so the idea then—my own view—is that lawlessness is restrained by the rule of law. Yeah; go ahead.

Gary: By the law do you mean secular or religious law?

“Standing Firm”

Jeff: So what I said the last time is that I think this can be either. I think that what you can think of is you can think of the law written on tablets of stone, and that is the law. But then you can think about the law written on the heart, which is the same as the law written on tablets of stone.

I think I mentioned this last time; I may not have. Maybe I did because I remember Ted asking me about how I was pronouncing the *Tao* in the appendix of C.S. Lewis' *The Abolition of Man*, where he takes you through different cultures, and he shows you that basically the law that is written upon man's heart is a law that's written everywhere in the world upon man's heart, right? If you steal from somebody in some other culture, or even if it's some culture that's out in the darkest region of the world, they know you've stolen, and they feel a lack of justice as a result. So there's a sense in which the law written upon the heart is the same as that written upon stone. But the administration may be different in terms of a secular society versus a theonomic society like Israel. The fact of the matter is that it's the same law being applied, just in a different way and from a different source: one from general revelation and one from special revelation. Does that make sense? Okay.

All right. Now I want to say a couple of things about this for just a minute. So what restrains? Well, law. And when you look at Romans 13, for instance, Romans 13 is one of those texts that's kind of a low bar text. If you ask the question, what does God require when it comes to the church?, He's a lot more specific in the New Testament. If you ask, what does God require from the civil government, He's not as specific. Although I do think that there's a general equity from the law that is to be applied to the state, I think the fact of the matter is that when you think about the New Testament and what it says about civil government, it's pretty slim pickin's.

What do I mean? In Romans 13 what does he say? He basically says that a chimp can be a magistrate. Why? Because all he has to do is punish the bad and reward the good, right? This is a pretty low-bar expectation. I mean, that ought to tell you where we are today, when the bad are rewarded and the good are punished. But the point is that you get the idea. There's a low bar; there's a low expectation. And what's the regulative principle for civil government? Punish the bad; reward the good.

All right. So there's a guy by the name of Russell Kerth. I'm not sure he's a Christian; in fact he may not be, I just don't know. But I've read enough of his political philosophy to know that he makes a lot of Biblical connections. And I want to show you a couple of quotes. And I may have to read them to you because they're small. I want to show you a couple of quotes that I think are helpful to think about what I'm saying here. And by the way his dates are 1918-1994. He did a variety of things. He wrote substantial political theory books. He was an essayist and a columnist, a historical critic and those kinds of things. But *The Roots of American Order* and *The Conservative Mind* are two of the books that he wrote that have most influenced me. So let me give you some of these quotes.

First of all he said, *“The truth may be more readily understood in the troubled 20th century than it was in the 19th. Under tribulation men come to realize that they are feeble and imperfect. If they try to stand by themselves they recognize their failings, what the Hebrews called their sinfulness.”*

“Standing Firm”

Now the reason I put this quote up here is because he talks about that under tribulation, if men try to stand they realize how imperfect or sinful they are. And this text is really about standing, standing firm. And it’s about a group of people standing firm in the midst of tribulation. I mean, this is what they experienced when you look at Acts 17.

So here we’ve got a group of people standing in the midst of tribulation and realizing their failure. That’s why Paul has to help them with a right mind. He has to settle their thinking so that their lives can be settled as they move out.

So that’s the first quote that I wanted to show you. But my point—at least my subsidiary point—is that one realizes that he’s sinful before any law as they try to stand on their own in the face of tribulation.

Then he says this. He says, “*The Ten Commandments are not a set of harsh prohibitions. They are liberating rules that enable a people to diminish the tyranny of sin, that teach a people how to live with one another—how to restrain violence and fraud, how to know justice.*” In other words, the law enables us to live together.

And what does the law do? Well, one of the things that he says—and he’s not thinking about 2 Thessalonians 2,—but what he’s saying is what everybody knows. And that is that the law restrains violence. The law restrains lawlessness. And so in one sense I think it’s very clear to anybody thinking about law and order (if I can use that phrase without referencing the television show that I never watched), I digress. (*Laughter*) But anyway, even the simplest human communities cannot endure without some form of laws consciously held and enforced.

Now these laws, regardless of where you are in the world, are only the expressions of God’s moral law, his moral code written on tablets of stone as they manifest themselves in our lives. But the point is, for instance I’ll give you one. For instance, the cannibal may eat you. But it’s wrong for him to eat his own family. I mean, there’s a line, right? And the point is that there is some line he will not cross, even when it comes to eating people. So it’s a little farther back then we would draw it, but you get the idea. (*Laughter*)

And then he writes, “*The law is revealed to save man from self-destruction.*” It’s interesting. Kerth may be talking about salvation a little differently than I would talk about salvation. But in one sense he does believe—and I think he’s right—that the imposition of law, the imposition of God’s law even in a context of general revelation where man is secular and sinful and doesn’t know anything about the moral code written on tablets of stone, is preserved from self-destruction by way of his application of civil law in his community, even if it’s the most primitive.

So again, what is the restrainer? I think that the restrainer happens to be a what and a he. And I think it is the law imposed, regardless of how one manifests it. So that’s kind of where I’m coming from, and I’m going to apply it as we go. Do you have any questions? Does that make sense to you? Okay. Yes?

Ted: Jeff, to me—and I’ll just go backwards—I’m thinking about justice. I think the law is there to guarantee justice.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: Because people feel that things are unjust. That’s when you have problems.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: And that’s when you have the society destroy itself.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely.

“Standing Firm”

Ted: I mean, justices a matter of saying, “I want the right.” I want it to work out right for me as long as I follow the rules.

Jeff: Yeah. And you know, the funny thing about it is that even when you have this—and I think I may have mentioned this the last time—even when you move in a direction where you have the college professor who is teaching Marxism. But if you were to deduct something from his pay that he did not authorize you to deduct—for instance giving to a group of his students that were in need—and he would say, “Why was this deducted from my pay?”

“Well, we kind of wanted to practice your Communism.” He would go “What?” I mean, you can just see it, right? The injustice he feels is obviously an injustice that isn’t fabricated; it comes out and it’s hard, you know, because it’s written there.

Ted: Progressives tend to see injustice on a societal level versus an individual level.

Jeff: Yes, that’s very true. Well, the response of the Thessalonians, and notice this. So the Thessalonians are living in Thessalonica; this takes us back to Acts 17. What do they say about the Christians? Well listen to what they say; this is interesting. They are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, that is, the dogma of Caesar, saying that “*there is another King, Jesus.*”

Now I want you to think about this for just a minute. There’s a sense in which we can very much relate to the Thessalonians in Acts 17. Why? Because what did they fear? They feared the loss of public order. They feared the loss of justice and rule. They’re claiming another king. You know what this means: this means rebellion; this means anarchy. I mean, there’s a sense in which, if we were in Thessalonica we could get it. We could understand what they’re saying, right?

You get it, right? There’s a sense in which the Thessalonians want order. And so the Thessalonians and the Christians in one sense fear the same thing. The overthrow of order will lead to chaos and disorder. And the non-application of the law has social scenarios, and so forth.

Yet if you compare the Thessalonians and the fear so social disorder as ordered by Caesar, here’s where it’s different. The Christians’ fear so social disorder is ordered by Christ. And in one sense you might say that the application of the law as it pertains to the Romans was very much in common with the law written on tablets of stone.

I mean, when I think about Russell Kerth’s *The Roots of American Order*, one of the things that he does is show that the roots of justice in Rome had an affinity with the tablets that Moses wrote by the finger of God. So there’s a sense in which the two coalesce at one point.

And yet there’s a clear and distinct difference. And the clear and distinct difference is Caesar and Christ. That’s the clear and distinct difference. So again that takes us to Romans 13. Romans 13 says that the magistrate is the servant of God. And as the servant of God he administrates rewards for those who do good and punishment to those who do evil.

Okay? Now I want to move on about this. But does that make sense to you? Any questions or thoughts?

Ron Baling: Is the censorship today their attempt to keep order, as with the Communists, to keep descent down and to maintain order?

“Standing Firm”

Jeff: Yeah. When you move away from the rule of law then you have to employ different ways to keep control. That’s right; that’s one of them.

Well, the second letter of Thessalonians deals with more unsettled thoughts. As we learned earlier, we learned that there was a spirit, a letter, a word that had come to them and had unsettled them. And Paul says, *“So then, brothers, stand firm.”* This is in our section, starting in verse 13. *“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word, or by our letter.”* And so in other words the idea is that you were unsettled by someone else’s incitements to your thinking. I’m telling you how to be settled, and that is to settle your thoughts on what I’m sending you in this letter—what you’ve heard from us—those things that you know have been taught by us, and so on. So the idea is, get your thinking right and then your living will follow. Right thinking leads to right living. And if you want to extend that it leads to right dying.

All right. So let’s think a little further about this. And let’s think about the process of standing firm. And the process of standing firm, as I’ve been saying, begins with words. Words help in the rain. And we’ve been saying that. And here’s what I want you to catch. Apostolic doctrine equals trusted words. Trusted words take us back to apostolic doctrine. In other words, the things that were handed down to us are things that we can build our lives on.

You know, we often talk about the rule that rules, and we often talk about the rule that is ruled. The rule that rules is the Bible. And the other rules that are ruled by that rule are things like confessions and catechisms and those kinds of things. But those have to be normed by the rule that rules.

So this is just another way of saying that Scripture is the rule that rules all things. And so when we think about settled thoughts and apostolic doctrine and trusted words we’re thinking about the Scriptures. And the Scriptures are that which gives us the rule by which to measure everything else—other people’s written words, other people’s statements, everything. We rule it by those words. And if it comes up wanting, depending on how bad it is, we have to deal with it. But no matter how we deal with it, what we have to do is, we have to stand firm and hold on, as Paul says. We have to stand firm and hold on. Is that not right?

And how do we do that? Well we do that in God’s word. I want to show you something; it’s in Matthew chapter 7. And it’s at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. It’s in verse 24. He says, *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”*

“And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house. And it fell, and great was its fall.”

And so very clearly we get the unmistakable sense that if we’re going to stand firm and hold on, then our lives have to be built upon the Scriptures, God’s infallible Word. And there is no other place to stand. So that’s first.

Second, Paul shows them how to do this; he shows them how to do this. In other words, what he’s telling them is, theology is eminently practical.

“Standing Firm”

Now let me show you something. I’m going to show you something in Thessalonians. But before I take you there let me remind you of something that I think is quite an interesting thing. When you think about the night before Jesus dies, one of the things that is striking is that Jesus gives the men in the Upper Room a theology lesson. He teaches them about the Trinity.

Now think about that. You might think to yourself, teaching them about the Trinity? That’s the most abstract doctrine in the Christian canon. Yet He’s teaching them about Father, Son and Holy Spirit the night before they’re ready to see Him die. That’s a profound thing when you think about it. We often tend to think that theology is way down the ladder. But Jesus didn’t see it as such.

Nor did He see the practice that flows out of theology. And I want you to see that in the letter to the Thessalonians. Notice this. He says, *“But we ought always to give thanks for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you.”* This is in 1 Thessalonians 2:4. *“We give thanks to God always for you. For we know, Brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you.”* In other words, he’s basically talking to them about election.

Now we think about election as one of the most divisive and impractical doctrines of the Christian faith. And yet here he is, writing to this group of people unsettled by words spoken by another letter, another prophet, another apostle, a super apostle, and so on. And he’s telling them, “Let me tell you about why you ought to stand firm, why you ought to feel the love of God.” It’s because of God’s electing love.

As you know, election doesn’t mean that we cast our vote for him. You know, Satan casts his vote for us, Jesus casts His vote for us, and we cast our vote in deciding who wins. It doesn’t mean that at all. Have you heard that? I’m sorry to say that I heard that once.

But it doesn’t mean that. It means that He chose us. He actually laid hold of us and saved us. And when you think about where you are in life, I don’t know about you. But when I think about God’s hand being laid upon me and saving me, then any situation is bearable in life; it really is, because I think to myself, while the waves churn about me I know that I’m in the safest place of all, in the palm of the living God, because He chose me.

Now I might die in this life, right? But He even says that. He says, “Don’t fear those who can kill the body. But fear Him who can cast the soul into hell.” So I understand that He’s talking in ultimate terms. And yet I’m ultimately kept in His hand. And so I think that’s a powerful thing.

Ted: Jeff?

Jeff: Yes?

Ted: The confidence comes not so much from God’s election, but from the fact that you cannot extract yourself from God’s election.

Jeff: Yes; that’s right.

Ted: People will say that God chooses you. But you have a choice as to whether to respond to that. If you do not respond, then you’re out of luck.

Jeff: Yeah. And you know, the thing is that you can look at this in one of two ways, right? Let me try to make this quick; it’s a simple illustration, right? You are either the guy who is drowning and needs a life preserver; it’s thrown and you have to choose it. Or

“Standing Firm”

you are already dead; you’re already at the bottom of the lake. And God brings you out of the lake and brings you back to life. That’s the election I’m talking about. That’s Ephesians 2:4.

Transcriber’s Note: Ephesians 2:4, ESV. *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.”*

Jeff: He made us alive in Christ Jesus by grace. So yes, that’s a great point. You can see this in other places. Ephesians 1:4: *“Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.”* James 2:5: *“Listen, my beloved brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom?”* So clearly this is a doctrine that is throughout. He’s demonstrating that theology comforts; it settles the mind.

And then thirdly he applies the lesson. And the Thessalonians are troubled by a word, a letter or a deed. And in particular they are troubled by the teaching that the day of the Lord has already come. But here’s what I want you to notice. Paul answers this. In 2 Thessalonians 2:14 he says, *“To this He called you through our gospel.”* Now catch this. *“So that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

He’s answering the fear. The fear was that the day of the Lord had already come and they missed it. And look at what he says to them. “He has called you so that you may obtain the glory that is found in the Lord alone, on the day of His appearing.” And so he’s telling them, “You’ve not missed anything.”

Or 2 Thessalonians 1:10: *“When He comes on that day to be glorified”* where? *“In His saints.”* In other words, what’s the point of all this? The point of all this is that the elect do not miss the coming of the Lord. Why? Because the coming of the Lord is for the elect, so that in them God will be glorified. That’s the idea. And so it’s a beautiful thing when you think about it. He’s answering the fear. Yes, please?

Jim Hamilton: So we have nothing to do with being the elect. That’s a determination that God makes for us individually.

Jeff: That’s right.

Jim: And if we’re lucky enough to be part of the elect, then things will happen where we’ll probably be saved. Without that, we’re done.

Jeff: Yeah. And the thing you have to realize is that there are no people out there who are not elect who wish they were elect. If they are non-elect, they couldn’t care less. And so the determination is their own. In fact, this is a powerful text. Check out 1 Peter chapter 2.

In 1 Peter chapter 2 he talks about Jesus being *“the Stone of stumbling, the Rock of offense.”* Now listen to what he says; this is halfway down the verse. 1 Peter 2 verse 8, halfway down. It’s those who stumble over the Stumbling Stone. He says, *“They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.”*

Now actually, in half of a verse, you have two things that we oftentimes think are contradictory. You have the responsibility of man to obey, and you have the sovereignty of God in election. And Francis Schaeffer used to talk about them as two parallel lines that run to heaven that meet in God. In other words, how to figure those two things out and how to reconcile them, he called an antinomy—two seemingly contradictory things that aren’t contradictory. God is able to reconcile them in Himself.

“Standing Firm”

So when you preach the gospel I never say, “Now I just want you to know starting out that you’re not going to be able to believe this unless God enables you to believe this.”

Ted: Right.

Jeff: “So let’s just get that straight.” What I do when I share the gospel with somebody is, I say, “Look, are you going to believe this or not? It’s incumbent on you to believe it. Here’s the Word; it’s calling on you to obey, and it’s calling on you to exercise faith. Are you going to have faith in this Messiah that this Word is presenting?” Mike, did you—

Don Bishop: I’m not Mike.

Jeff: No, no, no; I thought it was Mike. I saw a hand over there.

Don: This is the thing that gets us all in a knot.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: We have to rationalize either one or the other.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: And I went through a dozen verses. For instance in Acts 2, *“This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite design and foreknowledge of God, you crucified.”*

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: How could he blame them if God ordained it?

Jeff: Yep.

Don: It’s a mystery to us. God elects us, yet commands us to respond.

Jeff: You know, it’s Genesis 50, where the brothers come and they’re afraid of Joseph. And Joseph says, “Hey, look. You basically did what the sovereign God planned that you would do.” *“You intended it for evil; God intended it for good.”* “God superintended it, and so it’s all working out.”

But the fact of the matter is, if you would have asked the brothers, if you would have said to the brothers, “Did you do to Joseph what you wanted to do to him?”, they would say, “Oh yeah. We actually wanted to do a little more than we did. He was a dirt bag.” You know what I mean; that sort of thing, right? And so they did exactly what they wanted to do to him. And yet that was superintended by God. God was actually doing more than just inflicting punishment on a bratty little boy, for he was such. What he was doing was that He was moving an entire people, right? Joseph was part of this redemptive plan that was actually moving His people from one place to another. I mean, he was the pin that moved them from Egypt into the Promised Land. Yet they got to do what they wanted to do. Yes?

Gary: If what God ordains includes the concept of what God allows, that makes the whole thing a little vague and I think easier to understand, because He’s allowing this for His purposes. But it doesn’t mean He’s causing it.

Jeff: Yes. That’s always the question, right? That’s a theological conundrum. Can a sovereign God actually allow it, right?:? Sure.

Don: Well, in the Westminster Confession of Faith—

Jeff: Secondary causation.

Don: We can’t understand it. But it explains it, how God works through secondary means.

Jeff: Yes, for sure.

“Standing Firm”

Ted: And to push back on that ultimately, after we come out of the question of choice and election, it really is up to God. People just don't care for the God which that implies.

Jeff: Yeah; that's right.

Ted: Really that's ultimately the issue. I got into a conversation with a woman who is a Christian on the issue of abortion. And the conversation was in the context of other people who were very pro-abortion.

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: And she said, “It's just not fair that God made women to be the ones who have children.” This was a Christian woman.

Jeff: Mm-hmm.

Ted: And so ultimately the issue came back to God. God has a problem.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: And the problem is that I don't like the way He works things out.

Jeff: Yeah.. Yes?

Gary: I read the same thing in Peter Hitchens' book; this is Christopher Hitchens' brother.

Jeff: Yes.

Gary: He was also an atheist who came to faith. He says that when he came to faith his rebellion against God,--his sin, whatever,--became less organized, but it was still there.

Jeff: Mm-hmm.

Gary: And that to me is the reason that election is brought up. It's to explain to people how people can still be sinful, as we are in Adam.

Jeff: Anybody else?

Mike Davis: Just a thought. As I look at this, I don't go as far as thinking about why God didn't save other people.

Jeff: Mm-hmm.

Mike: We're to be His ambassadors. This to me is a great encouragement.

Jeff: Yeah.

Mike: We have great purpose as we sit around this room this morning. As those who are believers in Christ we have great purpose. We're His ambassadors. We're empowered to deal with all kinds of implications. That we've been chosen brings all kinds of implications that we don't like to deal with a whole lot.

Jeff: Yeah.

Mike: We kind of like to push them away by getting sidetracked with other things. But the reality is that we're marked for major purposes for the kingdom of God.

Jeff: You know what? You know, it's funny. But when I was thinking about this doctrine, back when I was in college one of the things that I hated about it was that I hated the fact that it seemed so unfair to the unbeliever. And one of the things that hit me right in the face was Romans 9:22. *“What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy.”* That's what you were saying, Mike. This idea of God's election is to manifest to us His great mercy. And vessels of wrath are there to remind us of His great mercy that was expressed toward us in Christ.

“Standing Firm”

And so that verse actually situated my thinking to say that I need to stop thinking about the unbelievers, as if this is not fair. God knows what’s fair and what’s not fair. And what He’s doing in the life of the unbeliever is that He’s demonstrating to me the mercy that I received. And I ought to take it more seriously and to think more carefully about the mercy that I have.

And then out of that I started arranging my thinking related to other texts. For instance it’s in 2 Timothy where Paul says, *“I endure everything for the sake of the elect,”* because who are those elect? For Paul those elect who he is enduring everything for are sinners, right? And so all of a sudden you’re thinking that this is how I think of myself in relation to the election of God. I have a great mercy. But then this is how I now come out of that and treat the unbeliever. I endure everything for the sake of the unbeliever. Why? Because I know that God’s elect are out there who I don’t know; I can’t point them out. But I know this. I know that as I go out and take the gospel, this great mercy that was given to me is going to be given to other people when I may not know who those are. But I know they’re out there because God tells me that. And therefore Paul says that *“I endure everything for the sake of the elect,”* putting that in its positive sense. Those people are going to receive great mercy. Does that make sense?

Mike: Yes.

Jeff: It’s kind of like this orders not only my thinking about myself and about how to think about myself, but it also orders my thinking about others too, you know.

Don Bishop: It makes salvation definite.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: We’re preaching to the elect who are there.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: It’s awesome.

Jeff: Well you know, I was actually a rabid Arminian when I was in college.

Mike: Should we still be listening to you? *(Laughter)*

Ted: At least he wasn’t a murderer or something. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I was a rabid Arminian in college. My college professors would actually see me coming into their classes, and you could just see this groan. “Oh, it’s him!”, you know. Well there were actually three things that led me to move toward a Calvinistic view. I’ll tell you about them in just a minute.

I was having a conversation with a guy that was a classmate in an empty classroom. And this is what he said to me. He said, “Stivason, you’re dumb! You’re dumb!”

“Now tell me why you just said that.”

He said, “Look, I’m going to tell you something right now. Think about what you’re saying. What you’re saying is that God granted the possibility of salvation to everyone. And that means that there could be no one saved? I mean, it’s conceivable—a low percentage—but it’s conceivable that no one would take this offer, or that everyone would take this offer.” So he said, “You’re either in the camp of no one saved or everyone saved, or there’s the possibility of some saved in the middle.” But he said, “The possibility is opened for you to be a universalist. How do you feel about that?”

And I didn’t say anything at the moment. But then he went on and he said, “And how do you reconcile the Scripture when it talks about a definite number of people that God knows? And Paul knows that he’s elect, that He has died for me. He endures for the sake

“Standing Firm”

of the elect. Seemingly God knows the number, and so on. How do you reconcile that with a seemingly definite number in the Scriptures?”

And that was one of the things that hit me. If God is God He must know how many there are who are elect, and that has to be a definite number. I don’t know it but He does, right? That was one of the things.

The other two things were that I was in a class where there was a professor of a philosophy of religion class. And I hated it; it was the only class I’ve ever hated. It was the only class in my whole college career I ever skipped, because apparently the professor told one of the students who was a TA for him—and I found this out later—but the TA was over at his house and he said, “We’re going to take our entire class and we’re going to try to make Stivason a Calvinist.” (*Laughter*) In every class we’d argue about Arminianism and Calvinism; I hated it. And he was actually worse than I was in terms of rabidity for Calvinism. But anyway, go ahead.

Jim: So being elect is something that God does for you, right?

Jeff: Yep.

Jim: Regardless of what I’m doing I either am or am not elected.

Jeff: Yep.

Jim: And God makes that judgment regardless of what I’ve done. Now if I am elected I’m probably going to change in terms of my behavior.

Jeff: Not probably. If you’re elect, then the blood starts to pump and you’re a different person.

Jim: If I’m not elect, forget it; I’m done. Is that right?

Jeff: If you’re not elect you’re done, but you don’t care that you’re done.

Jim: That’s correct. It’s cut and dry.

Ted: And you don’t desire God.

Jeff: Yes, you don’t desire God.

Ted: You have no desire for the things of God.

Jeff: Yes; that’s right.

Ted: You don’t want to go to church; you find it all irrelevant.

Jeff: Yeah.

Jim: But it’s a decision that God makes, independent of what we do.

Jeff: Yes.

Don Bishop: But Ted, even if you go to church, like Catholics, they’re worshiping a different God.

Ted: Catholics are not worshiping a different God. They have some bad practices in their errors. As I have said before, we can stand and say the Nicene Creed and they can too with a straight face. So it’s not a different God; there’s some error. And there are people over at Christ Church that are going to church for all the wrong reasons. The wheat and the tares, that’s all we have.

Jeff: That’s true of every church, right?

Gary: You know, I keep in mind the fact that there are people that cannot be saved without breaking their wills. No matter what circumstances they get into, I don’t think they can be saved unless God breaks their wills; it’s something that He wanted to do.

Jeff: Yes, and he never breaks the will, right? There’s no such thing as a broken will. That’s an expression we have, but we do choose, one way or another.

“Standing Firm”

Ron: But you know, with free will I think that what you’ll probably find is that if you have a will that is free then a free will ought to be a sustained offer.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ron: Remember that a couple of months ago someone spoke here on marriage, or whatever? Who was that? Anyway, he gave me a book on systematic Reformed theology. It came to the exact same conclusion that I came to a couple of years ago. We have a will that’s free, but it’s not free in and of itself. A will that’s free means that it’s free from external control. But it’s not free in and of itself.

Jeff: So an Arminian is a libertarian-style free will person, right? In other words, they have a view of freedom that means that nothing influences that will. That will is absolutely free and can choose any choice unencumbered, unhindered.

And there’s a compatibilist-style free will. And the compatibilist-style free will says no. The will is always influenced by something, right? In other words, if there’s a Big Mac back on that table, or a Whopper on that table and I choose the one, you can be sure that there’s a reason why I chose the one and not the other one, right? Even if it’s a small, stupid reason, there’s still something that influenced my will, because my will doesn’t have a mind of its own. I have a mind and I have affections. And they influence and determine my choices.

So yes, you’re absolutely right. There are people that almost view the will as sort of its own entity, as if it has a mind and certain affections all its own, and it chooses this way or that way. But the will is just an expression of the faculty of choice. But it does what the mind and the affections want it to do, and sometimes they’re in conflict with one another, right?

Okay. Well, that’s it. Why don’t we pick this up the next time, three weeks from today? And Merry Christmas to you all. Happy New Year.

Brave Men: Merry Christmas.

Jeff: Let’s pray and we’ll adjourn. Father, thank You for this day, for the blessing of life in Christ. Thank You, Father, that You remind us of these things, that it’s important for us to stand firm, to stand on the basics of Your word. Lord, we ask that You’ll give us that kind of determination. Father, we pray that we won’t be exasperated in a world that seems to be going in circles and downward. But help us to be mindful that our influence is real in You and that we can influence people around us for good. And so Father, help to settle our thinking so that our lives might be settled in the way that we live them. And Father, we pray that You’ll bless us in that regard, even as we adjourn over the holidays. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Don Rimbey: Before you all go, I just want to give this to Jeff.

Transcriber’s Note: Don gives Jeff an envelope.

Don: I echo Ted’s words about being appreciative for his teaching. *(Applause)* And I wish him a very merry Christmas, and here’s a token of our appreciation.

Jeff: Thank you. *(Applause)*